UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1998/788
21 August 1998
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

LETTER DATED 21 AUGUST 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to draw your attention to the declaration by the Presidency of the European Union concerning the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, issued on 19 August 1998.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ernst SUCHARIPA
Permanent Representative of
Austria to the United Nations

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Annex

[Original: English]

Declaration by the Presidency of the European Union concerning the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The European Union is deeply concerned by the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It recalls its declaration of 11 August (S/1998/753, annex) and in particular, its support for the principles of territorial integrity and respect for the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as its appeal for peaceful solutions to the current problems so that the process of reconstruction and democratization can proceed.

The European Union is particularly alarmed by reports of human rights abuses in the country. These reports credibly allege rounding-up, detention, beating, torture, ethnic propaganda including hate radio broadcasts and in some cases summary execution of Tutsis and possibly civilians of other ethnic groups by authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the one hand as well as severe human rights abuses being committed by rebel and possibly other forces on the other. The European Union strongly condemns all these violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and urges all parties to the conflict to take the necessary measures to prevent such violations by security forces under their command, to abstain from inciting ethnic hatred in order to avoid the expansion of the human rights violations in the region and not to persecute civilians on the grounds of nationality or ethnicity. The EU also calls upon all parties to abstain from recruiting child soldiers.

In this context the European Union believes it vitally important that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as a neutral and independent organization entrusted with ensuring the application of international humanitarian law, is granted unhindered access to persons currently being detained within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The EU therefore calls upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other parties to the conflict to follow up on their commitment to grant protection to those at risk and to provide ICRC with all necessary information on the location of detention sites, to allow access to those sites and to provide adequate security for the detainees.

The Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus associated with the European Union and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) countries members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.